

SK

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 April 1961

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 21-61 (Internal ONE Working Paper - CIA
Distribution Only)

SUBJECT: The Arab Attitude Toward the New US Administration

NOTE TO THE BOARD

The attached memorandum describes a situation which according to our soundings is of considerable concern to the Department of State and the working levels of the Intelligence Community at the present time. We recommend that the Board consider forwarding it to the Director.

SECRET

SECRET

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 April 1961

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 21-61 (Internal ONE Working Paper - CIA
Distribution Only)

SUBJECT: The Arab Attitude Toward the New US Administration*

1. Most Arabs made it clear in advance that they suspected and feared increased US partiality toward Israel in the event of a Democratic victory in the US elections last November. They tended to evaluate developments immediately after the election and during the first weeks of the new administration from the standpoint of this prejudice, although as late as mid-March even Cairo and Damascus radios continued to insist that the Arabs would judge US policy by the actions of President Kennedy rather than by the statements of Candidate Kennedy.

2. During the past six weeks Arab judgment has crystalized rapidly as the cumulative result of several developments. Chief among these are: (1) the President's highlighting at his 15 March

* This memorandum has been discussed with OCI and DD/P.

SECRET

SECRET

press conference of a \$25 million Import-Export Bank Loan to Israel, (2) widespread rumors of a new American plan aimed at achieving Israeli access to the Suez Canal in return for American-financed resettlement of the Arab refugees, (3) a weakening American amendment to the UN resolution supporting the Arab-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission's condemnation of Israel for bringing heavy military equipment into Jerusalem, and (4) US opposition to a UN resolution proposing, inter alia, that the UN become custodian of Arab refugee property in Israel.

3. The Arab press, as well as many Arab leaders and officials, have condemned these events in strong terms. This has been true of "friendly" countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon, as well as neutralists such as the UAR and Iraq. Arab resentment has been spurred by what they consider the gratuitous nature of US gestures of support for Israel and a widespread feeling among Arabs at the UN that the US delegation is deliberately slighting them. Such US actions as might have been interpreted in a favorable way by the Arabs, e.g. the appointment of Ambassador Badeau to Cairo, US financial support for the preservation of the antiquities on the island of Philae in the upper Nile, and the US stand against Portuguese colonialism

-2-

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

in Africa, have gone almost unnoticed, being overshadowed by the events relating to Israel, that perennial touchstone of Arab policy.

4. The dominant tone of the Arab reaction has been, as usual, extreme. Much of it is emotional, irresponsible, and illogical. In those countries whose governments are friendly to the US, the storm will probably abate without any fundamental policy changes. Even in the UAR and Iraq, attention will wax and wane with the changing international scene. Nonetheless, we believe that a significant hardening in general Arab attitudes toward the US is now taking place. Tendencies in this direction are encouraged by the Arabs' apprehensions over Israel's nuclear project and Israeli plans to divert the Jordan waters.

5. If this trend is not at least checked, we believe that Arab distrust and hostility -- which has a peculiar capacity for feeding on itself -- will continue to grow. Any such development as the early visit to the US to see President Kennedy which Israeli Premier Ben Gurion is trying to promote would serve dramatically to confirm and strengthen the trend. Should it continue, the US could expect to find its position more difficult in dealing with the Arabs on a host of problems -- not only those

-3-

SECRET

CONFIDENTIAL

~~SECRET~~

immediately affecting Arab matters and the Arab-Israeli question, but also the US effort to eliminate the Soviet position as sole champion of nationalism and neutralism. The Arabs sense of grievances against the West is great, and Arab interests will continue to conflict with those of the US on many points. The improvement of the US-Arab relations will necessarily be a long-term problem, involving many vicissitudes, and, in the absence of some prompt gestures of US reassurance and attention to Arab sensibilities, the situation is likely to grow worse before it gets better.

-4-

~~SECRET~~

CONFIDENTIAL